

Autobiographies— General

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BIOGRAPHY

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Biographies and Stories of Abraham Lincoln

Autobiographies – General

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of the
LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH
FOUNDATION

Louis A. Warren - - Editor

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LINCOLN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

It does not seem to be known, generally, outside the circle of students who have become interested in the life of Abraham Lincoln, that at the request of different parties he prepared some sketches about himself. These autobiographical notes have been the source of our most valuable information about his family history, early life, and public service. When first approached about writing some notes for a newspaper editor he replied that it would be folly to attempt to make anything out of his early life as it could be condensed into a single line found in Gray's Elegy: "The short and simple annals of the poor." However he set about preparing for this editor, Mr. Scripps, his most complete autobiographical sketch, too long to print in these columns.

Dictionary of Congress—1858

Possibly the most condensed data which he presented, was sent to the editor of the Dictionary of Congress for 1858, upon the usual request for a sketch of his life. It follows in six brief sentences.

"Born, February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky.

"Education defective.

"Profession a lawyer.

"Have been a captain of volunteers in Black Hawk War.

"Postmaster at a very small office.

"Four times a member of the Illinois Legislature, and was a member of the lower house of Congress."

Yours, etc.

A. Lincoln.

Dictionary of Congress—1864

If Abraham Lincoln prepared another sketch for a revised issue of the same publication in 1864, the editor must have taken some liberties with it, or confused a portion of it at least with some other biographical notice. Aside from the reference to his schooling in Stafford County, Virginia, his subsequent occupation as a school teacher and his law training in Culpepper County, Virginia, the item seems to be fairly accurate.

Abraham Lincoln—He was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, February 12, 1809; removed with his father to Indiana in 1816; received a limited ed-

ucation; spent two years at school in Stafford County, Virginia; taught school and studied law for a time in Culpepper County, of that State; removed to Illinois in 1830, and turned his attention to agricultural pursuits; he served as a Captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk war; was at one time Postmaster in a small village; and he served four years in the Illinois Legislature, during which time he turned his attention again to the study of law, and settled at Springfield in the practice of his profession. He was a member of the National Convention which nominated General Taylor for President in 1848, and was a Representative in Congress, from Illinois, from 1847 to 1849, serving on the Committees on the Postoffice and Post-roads, and on Expenses in the War Department. In 1858 he acquired distinction by stumping the State of Illinois, for the United States Senate, against S. A. Douglas; and in 1860 he was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate for President of the United States, and was duly elected to that position for the term commencing the 4th of March, 1861. By the Baltimore Convention, held in 1864, he was nominated for re-election to the Presidency.

Autobiography Written for Fell

The autobiographical efforts to which authors most often refer was prepared by Mr. Lincoln for Jesse W. Fell and sent to him December 20, 1859, with the following letter:

J. W. Fell, Esq.

My dear Sir: Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the material. If it were thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objection. Of course it must not appear to have been written by myself.

Yours very truly,

A. Lincoln.

I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon County, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where a year or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New

England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten—the only time I have ever been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics; and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused me again. What I have done since that is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Yours truly,

A. Lincoln.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Compiled by

Louis A. Warren

"He (Grandfather of Abraham Lincoln) was killed by Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest." Fell.

"My grandfather's christian name was 'Abraham' He had four brothers - Isaac, Jacob, John and Thomas. They were born in Pennsylvania and my grandfather and some, if not all, the others in early life removed to Rockingham County, Virginia. There my father named Thomas was born." Chrisman.

"My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families, second families perhaps I should say." Fell.

"It is my father's understanding that Abraham, Mordecai, and Thomas are old family names of ours, my grandfather had as I think I have heard four brothers; Isaac, Jacob, Thomas and John. He had three sons Mordecai, Josiah, and Thomas, the last my father." S. Lincoln.

"Having reached his twenty eighth year he (Thomas Lincoln) married Nancy Hanks - mother of the present subject in the year 1806. She also was born in Virginia." Scripps.

"My father was Thomas Lincoln" Haycraft.

"I was born Feb. 12th. 1809" Fell.

"I was born Feb. 12th. 1809 in then Hardin County, Kentucky, at a point within the new County of Larue, a mile or a mile and a half from Hodgen's Mill now is. My parents being dead, and my own memory not serving, I know no means of identifying the precise locality. It was on Nolin Creek." Hicks.

"I was raised to farm-work, which I continued until I was twenty-two." Fell.

"At this time (1816) my father resided on Knob Creek on the road from Bardstown, Ky. to Nashville Tennessee at a point three or three and one-half miles south or southwest of Atherton's Ferry, on the Rolling Fork ." Scripps.

"Thomas the youngest son the father of the present subject, by the early death of his father, and the very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering laboring boy.... before he was grown he passed one year as a hired hand with his Uncle Isaac on Watauga, a branch of the Holston River." Scripps.

"Abraham took an early start as a hunter, which was never much improved afterwards..A few days before the completion of his eighth year in the absence of his father a flock of wild turkeys approached the new log cabin and Abraham with rifle an rifle gun standing on the inside, shot through a crack and killed one of them." Scripps

"The present subject has no brother or sister of the whole or half blood. He had a sister older than himself, who was grown and married but died many years ago. leaving no child; also a brother younger than himself who died in infancy." Scripps.

"In the Autumn of 1818 his (Abraham Lincoln's) mother died and a year afterwards his father married Mrs. Sally Johnston, at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, a good and kind mother to Abraham." Scripps

"My wife is the daughter of the late Robert Todd of Lexington, Kentucky, and a half sisters of hers is Mrs Ben Hardin Helm born and raised in Elizabethtown." Haycraft.

"He (Abraham Lincoln Sr) left a widow, three sons and two daughters The eldest son Mordecai....The Second son Josiah..... The eldest sister Mary..... The second sister Nancy... Thomas the youngest son the father of the present subject." Scripps.

"I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life." N.S.Add.

"He (Thomas Lincoln) removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. Fell.

"Before leaving Kentucky he (Abraham Lincoln) and his sister were sent, for short periods to A. B. C. schools, the first kept by Zachariah Riney and the second Caleb Hazel." Scripps

"If it be his (Thomas Lincoln's) lot to go now , he will have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before, and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere long to join them." Johnston

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"The family were originally Quakers though in latter times they have fallen away from the peculiar habits of that people." Scripps

"I was born on Nolin, very much nearer Hodgen's mill than the Knob Creek place is. Haycraft.

"I can scarcely believe that Gen. John B. Houston has been arrested, for no other offense than opposition to my reelection: for if that had been deemed sufficient cause for arrest, I should have heard of more than one arrest in Kentucky on election day." Bramlette.

"I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel." Hodges.

"The story of his (Abraham Lincoln Sr.) death by the Indians and of Uncle Mordecai then fourteen years old, killing one of the Indians, is the legend more strongly than all others imprinted upon my mind and memory. J. Lincoln.

"His (Abraham Lincoln Sr's) family did reside in Washington County, Kentucky, just as you say you found them in 1801 or 1803." D. Lincoln.

"The Eldest sister Mary married Ralph Crume, and some of her descendants are now known to be in Breckenridge County, Kentucky. The second sister Nancy married William Bramfield, and her family are known to have left Kentucky, Scripps

"I was not born at Elizabethtown but my mother's first child a daughter, two years older than myself was. Haycraft.

"As my parents have told me I was born on Nolin, very much nearer Hodgen's Mill than the Knob Creek place is. My earliest recollections however is of the Knob Creek place." Haycraft.

"The place on Knob Creek I mentioned by Mr. Read, I remember very well, but I was not born there." Haycraft

"The oldest son Uncle Mordecai near twenty years ago (1828) moved from Kentucky to Hancock county, Ill." D. Lincoln.

"From this place (Knob Creek Farm) he (Thomas Lincoln) moved to what is now Spencer County Ind. in the autumn of 1816. Abraham then being in his eighth year. This removal was partly on account of slavery but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles." Scripps

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1848-6-12 Want to see you and the boys very much. Letter to Mrs. Lincoln, June 12, 1848.

1863-8-8 Tell dear Tad poor "Nanny Goat" is lost. Letter to Mrs. Lincoln, August 8, 1863.

1863-11-20 Our sick boy, (Tad) for whom you kindly inquire, we hope is past the worst. Letter to Edward Everett, November 20, 1863.

1863-12-2 To those of the great west with whom I was born and have passed my life. Letter to George Updike and others, December 2, 1863.

1864-4-11 Mrs. Lincoln is so unwell that I now think we will not make the contemplated trip this week. Telegram to General B. B. Butler, April 11, 1864.

1864-4-5 Owing to sickness in my family, the Secretary of War made the arrest without notifying me that he had it in contemplation. Unfinished draft of letter to General N. P. Banks, April 5, 1864.

1865-3-17 A few words only. I was born in Kentucky, raised in Indiana, reside in Illinois, and now, here, it is my duty to care equally for the good people of all the States. Address to an Indiana Regiment, March 17, 1865. *where*

1848-3-24 I have mentioned that my grandfather's name was Abraham. He had, as I think I have heard, four brothers, Isaac, Jacob, Thomas and John. Letter to Mr. Solomon Lincoln, March 24, 1848.

LINCOLN LORE

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REMINISCENCES OF MY BOYHOOD DAYS—A. LINCOLN

In the Fall of 1844, I went into the neighborhood in which I was raised, where my mother and only sister were buried, and from which I had been absent about fifteen years. That part of the country is within itself as unpoetical as any spot on the earth, but still, seeing it and its objects and inhabitants, aroused feelings in me which were certainly poetry, though whether my expression of those feelings is poetry is quite another question. This piece of poetry of my own I was led to write:

My childhood's home I see again,
And sadden with the view
And still, as memory crowds my brain,
There's pleasure in it too.

O Memory! thou midway world
'Twixt earth and paradise,
Where things decayed and loved ones lost
In dreamy shadows rise.

And, freed from all that's earthly vile,
Seem ballowed, pure, and bright,
Like scenes in some enchanted isle
All bathed in liquid light.

As dusky mountains please the eye
When twilight chases day;
As bugle-notes that, passing by,
In distance die away.

As leaving some grand waterfall,
We, lingering, list its roar—
So memory will hallow all
We've known, but know no more.

Near twenty years have passed away
Since here I bid farewell
To woods and fields, and scenes of play,
And playmates loved so well.

Where many were, but few remain
Of old familiar things;
But seeing them, to mind again
The lost and absent bring.

The friends I left that parting day,
How changed, as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong manhood gray,
And half of all are dead.

I hear the loved survivors tell
How naught from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.

When I visited my old home in the Fall of 1844 I found an insane man, Matthew Gentry, still lingering in this wretched condition. He is three years older than I, and when we were boys we went to school together. He was rather a bright lad, and the son of a rich man of a very poor neighborhood. At the age of nineteen he unaccountably became furiously mad, from which condition he gradually settled down into harmless insanity. In my poetizing mood, I could not forget the impression his case made upon me. Here is the result:

But here's an object more of dread
Than aught the grave contains—
The human form with reason fled.
While wretched life remains.

When terror spread, and neighbors ran
Your dangerous strength to bind,
And soon, a howling, crazy man,
Your limbs were fast confined:

How then you strove and shrieked aloud,
Your bones and sinews bared;
And fiendish on the gazing crowd
With burning eyeballs glared:

And begged and swore, and wept and prayed
With maniac laughter joined;
How fearful were these signs displayed
By pangs that killed the mind!

And when at length the drear and long
Time soothed thy fiercer woes,
How plaintively thy mournful song
Upon the still night rose!

I've heard it oft as if I dreamed,
Far distant, sweet and lone,
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason dead and gone.

To drink its strains I've stole away.
All stealthily and still,
Ere yet the rising god of day
Had streaked the eastern hill.

Air held her breath; trees with the spell
Seemed sorrowing angels round,
Whose swelling tears in dewdrops fell
Upon the listening ground.

But this is past, and naught remains
That raised thee o'er the brute;
Thy piercing shrieks and soothing strain
Are like, forever mute.

Now fare thee well! More thou the cause
Than subject now of woe.
All mental pangs by time's kind laws
Hast lost the power to know.

O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince
That keepst the world in fear,
Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence,
And leave him lingering here?

Another, the subject a "Bear Hunt":

A wild-bear chase, didst never see?
Then hast thou lived in vain—
Thy richest bump of glorious glee,
Lies desert in thy brain.

When first my father settled here,
'Twas then the frontier line:
The panther's scream, filled night with fear
And bears preyed on the swine—

But woe for Bruin's short lived fun,
When rose the squealing cry;
Now man and horse, with dog and gun,
For vengeance, at him fly—

A sound of danger strikes his ear,
He gives the breeze a snuff;
Away he bounds, with little fear,
And seeks the tangled rough.

On press his foes, and reach the ground,
Where's left his half munched meal;
The dogs, in circles, scent around,
And find this fresh made trail—

With instant cry away they dash,
And men as fast pursue;
O'er logs they leap, through water splash,
And shout the brisk halloo—

Now to elude the eager pack,
Bear shuns the open ground;
Through matted vines, he shapes his track
And runs it, round and round—

The tall fleet cur, with deep-mouthed voice,
Now speeds him, as the wind;
While half-grown pup, and short-legged fice,
Are yelping far behind.

And fresh recruits are dropping in
To join the merry corps:
With yelp and yell—a mingled din—
The woods are in a roar—

And round, and round the chase now goes,
The world's alive with fun:
Nick Carters' horse his rider throws,
And Mose Hill drops his gun—

Now sorely pressed, bear glances back,
And lolls his tired tongue
When is, to force him from his track,
An ambush on him sprung—

Across the glade he sweeps for flight,
And fully is in view—
The dogs, new-fired, by the sight,
Their cry, and speed, renew—

The foremost ones, now reach his rear,
He turns, they dash away;
And circling now, the wrathful bear,
They have him full at bay—

At top of speed, the horsemen come,
All screaming in a row—
"Whoop! Take him Tiger—Selze him Drum"
Bang-bang—the rifles go—

And furious now, the dogs he tears,
And crushes in his ire—
Wheels right and left, and upward rears,
With eyes of burning fire—

But leaden death is at his heart,
Vain all the strength he plies.
And, spouting blood, from every part,
He reels, and sinks, and dies—

And now a din some clamor rose,
'Bout who should have his skin;
Who first draws blood, each hunter knows,
This prize must always win—

But who did this, and how to trace
What's true from what's a lie.
Like lawyers, in a murder case
They stoutly argify.

Aforesaid fice, of blustering mood,
Behind, and quite forgot.
Just now emerging from the wood,
Arrives upon the spot—

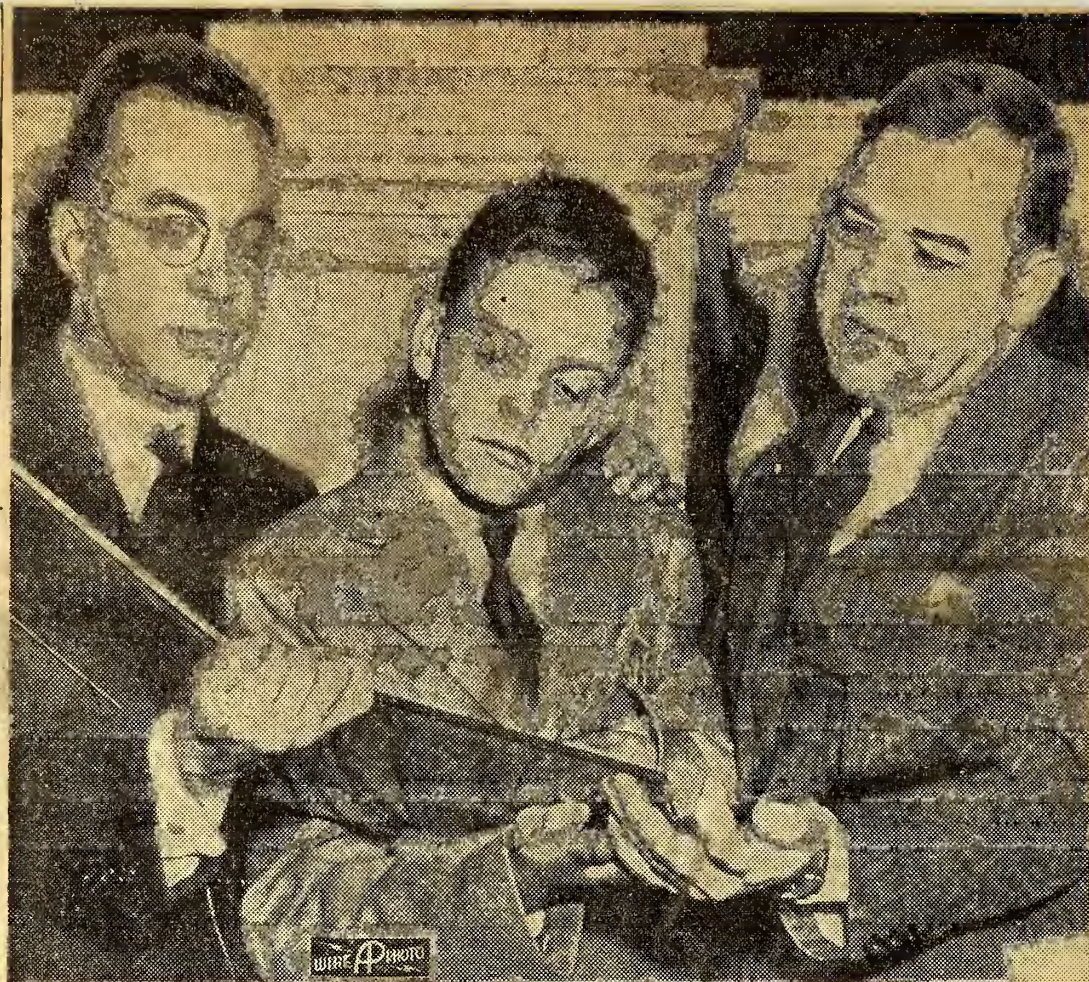
With grinning teeth, and up-turned hair—
Brim full of spunk and wrath.
He growls, and seizes on dead bear,
And shakes for life and death—

And swells as if his skin would tear,
And growls and shakes again;
And swears, as plain as dog can swear,
That he has won the skin—

Conceited whelp! we laugh at thee—
Nor mind, that not a few
Of pompous, two-legged dogs there be,
Conceited quite as you.

Editor's Note—This number of Lincoln Lore contains the third of a series of autobiographical sketches compiled from the writings of Abraham Lincoln which will appear from time to time in this bulletin. Every word used is just as Lincoln wrote it with the exception of substituting the first person for the third person as used by Lincoln in the sketch he prepared for John L. Scripps in 1859. L. A. W.

Library of Congress
Autobiography
Early years



LINCOLN MANUSCRIPT—Under close scrutiny of Rev. Robert D. Richardson, Medford, Mass. (left), and his son, Robert D. Richardson III (center), is the

original manuscript of Abraham Lincoln's autobiography. The elder Richardson presented the manuscript to Luther Evans, Librarian of Congress (right), today in Washington.

The Baltimore News-Post
— Wednesday, Feb. 12, 1947 —



I was born February 12th, 1809,
in then Hardin County, Kentucky,
at a point within the new county
of LaRue, a mile or a mile and a
half from where Hogden's Mill now
is.—A. Lincoln.

LINCOLN'S OWN BRIEF STORY OF HIMSELF

IN a tiny little book entitled the "Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln," which in 30 pages of what the printers call 12mo says all that Lincoln thought of interest to the world concerning himself, there are a few succinct statements which in view of his commanding figure in the history of human progress, are of interest and importance.

He says, for example, that his father was even in childhood "a wandering laboring boy and grew up literally without education. He never did more in the way of writing than to bunglingly write his own name."

Lincoln makes of himself the definite statement that the aggregate of all his schooling "did not amount to one year." He went occasionally for a few weeks or months to the A B C schools of the

time. He says that he was never in a college or academy as a student and never inside a college or academy building until after he had his law license. What he had in the way of education, he says he "picked up." After he was 23 he studied English grammar, "enough to speak it and write it as well as he now does," he says in the sketch, which is written in the third person. He studied and nearly mastered six books of Euclid after he became a member of Congress. He "regrets his want of education, and does what he can to supply the want." His nice use of the word want here is a rebuke to the carelessness of the present day which says want when it means wish.

He split a great many rails, he says, referring to the nickname "rail splitter." From the time he was a boy, "large for his age," an axe was in his hands most of the time till he was 23, "less of course in plowing and harvesting seasons." After his work as a flatboat hand at \$12 a month he was, "much to his surprise," elected captain of a volunteer company in the Blackhawk war of 1832. After this he ran for the Legislature and was defeated, but his own precinct cast 277 votes for him and only 7 against him, "and that, too, while he was an avowed Clay man," though next year the precinct gave a majority of 115 to Jackson against Clay. Lincoln writes: "This was the only time Abraham was ever beaten on a direct vote of the people." He was now without means and "studied what he should do." He "thought of learning the blacksmith trade—thought of trying to study law—rather thought he could not succeed at that without a better education." He finally did study law, after he had been elected to the state Legislature by the highest vote cast for any candidate. He then borrowed law books, took them home and studied alone. He was re-elected in 1836, 1838 and 1840, after which he declined reelection. In 1836 he obtained his law license and in 1837 removed to Springfield, where he began to practise.

In 1847 he went to Washington as

congressman from Illinois. In 1858 came the debates with Douglas over the United States senatorship.

In 1854, he says, his profession had almost superseded the thought of politics, when the repeal of the Missouri compromise "aroused him as he had never been aroused before." He took the stump to secure if possible the reelection of Yates to Congress—presumably a man opposed to the policies incorporated in the Kansas-Nebraska bill, which had set aside the Missouri compromise. He writes that his speeches "at once attracted more marked attention than they had ever before done." This sketch was prepared for use in the campaign of 1860, which elected Abraham Lincoln President of the United States.

